

UNIVERSITY OF ULSTER

REPORT OF THE REVALIDATION PANEL FOR SUBJECT UNIT 3C2B: CATARACT AND REFRACTIVE SURGERY (THEORY) (PG)

18 October 2017

PANEL: Professor R Fee, Associate Dean (Education), Faculty of Arts, Humanities and Social Sciences, Ulster University (Chair)
Mrs M Paris, Subject Partnership Manager, Faculty of Computing, Engineering and the Built Environment, Ulster University
Ms M Downey, Vice-President (Belfast), Ulster University Students' Union
Mr R Morris, Consultant Ophthalmic Surgeon, Optegra Eye Health Care, Surrey
Professor C Murphy, Consultant Ophthalmologist, Royal Victoria Eye and Ear Hospital, Dublin
Dr V Romano, Cornea Consultant, Royal Liverpool University Hospital

Revalidation Unit Co-ordinator: Professor T Moore, Biomedical Sciences Research Director, Ulster University

In attendance: Mrs K McCafferty, Academic Office, Ulster University

1 INTRODUCTION/BACKGROUND

The Panel met to consider the revalidation of the Postgraduate Diploma in Cataract and Refractive Surgery (Theory) with PgC exit award.

The PgD Cataract and Refractive Surgery (Theory) programme is offered by the School of Biomedical Sciences and is delivered fully online on a part-time basis over 32 weeks. The modules vary in duration from two weeks to six weeks. Previously, an MSc in Cataract and Refractive Surgery was on offer but was withdrawn at the start of the 2017/18 academic year.

The programme is comprised of nine compulsory modules and targeted at surgeons and other eye care specialists such as optometrists, orthoptists, laser technicians and nurses involved in assisting surgeons with cataract and refractive surgery procedures.

The programme curriculum and lecture content is in line with the Royal College of Ophthalmologist's (RCOphth) Certificate in Laser Refractive Surgery (CertLRS) and is now the only preparatory course for the CertLRS. Candidates who have graduated with the PgD in Cataract and Refractive Surgery (Theory) programme from 2016 will be able to seek exemption from the CertLRS written component. Members of the Ulster University Course Team have been involved with creating the multiple choice questions for the CertLRS written component and will be involved with writing the Viva questions.

Given the programme is delivered fully online and the majority of students are based outside Northern Ireland and in full-time employment it was not possible to arrange for students to meet with the panel. The Panel received class representative reports in advance of the meeting to give a student perspective.

The Course Team is comprised of external lecturers with the Course Director, Professor Tara Moore, being the only member of staff from the University. As the other Course Team members were unable to attend the meeting the Panel decided to meet with the Senior Management Team and the Course Director as a single group.

The Panel met with the Associate Dean (Global Engagement), Professor David Hassan, the Associate Head of School, Professor Jacqueline McCormack and Professor Tara Moore, Revalidation Unit Co-ordinator (and Course Director) to discuss how the programme fitted within the Faculty's other provision and to elaborate on the student numbers.

The Panel received a presentation by the Faculty of Life and Health Sciences, Sub-librarian on the library services available to support students on the programme. The Panel was very impressed with the vast amount of support provided to students which included an online library induction, guides on how to access databases and find e-journals and the various options available to search for reading texts.

Professor Moore also gave a short presentation about the programme and elaborated on the teaching methods and forms of assessment used in the delivery of the programme online.

2 DOCUMENTATION

The Panel received the following documentation:

- Course Submission
- Guidelines for Revalidation Panels
- QAA subject benchmark statement for Master's degree Characteristics (2010)
- External Examiners' Reports for 2014/15 and 2015/16
- Preliminary comments from Panel members

3 MEETING WITH SENIOR MANAGEMENT AND COURSE TEAM

3.1 Demand and Student Numbers

The Associate Head of School informed the Panel that the programme fitted well within the suite of distance learning programmes already offered by the Faculty. The Panel noted that the PgD in Cataract and Refractive Surgery (Theory) had been running for the past ten years and that the research strengths of the School of Biomedical Sciences had helped enhance the provision.

The Panel noted that student numbers appeared to go up and down each year and asked how the School managed to resource the programme. The Panel also commented on the low numbers from Northern Ireland studying on the programme. The Panel noted that many of the students were from the mainland or from other international locations.

The Team explained that the student numbers each year reflected the state of the economy and that it was difficult to predict intakes. The Team also advised the Panel that they did not wish to attract a large number each year as a group of 45 students, for example, would make online discussions more difficult to manage. The Panel noted that the Team did not market the programme heavily and that it was more through word of mouth that students became aware of the programme. The Team explained there was a limited market for graduates in Northern Ireland and that this was the main reason for the low home numbers. Higher student numbers came from those areas where there was more opportunities to work in laser surgery clinics. The Panel asked the Team what they considered would be the

optimum number of students they could manage and noted that an intake of 25-30 would provide a good student experience and a manageable workload for staff.

The Panel asked what would happen if a student became dominant in the discussions and noted that the tutors could hold back their comments until others had a chance to submit their thoughts. The Team also explained that they could discretely speak with the student and advise them to hold their thoughts until more comments had come through. The Panel noted that the tutors could also identify those students who were not logging on to the programme. The Team informed the Panel that all student activity was visible and if problems were identified these were sorted quickly.

The Panel noted that the students came from various backgrounds and that the Team preferred this multidisciplinary mix as it helped to highlight to the students how their individual roles connected within the cataract and refractive surgery environment.

The Panel also noted that the programme was a very valuable source of income to the School with 40% of the intake generated from overseas students.

3.2 Staffing

The Panel noted that the Course Team was small and enquired about staffing arrangements for the programme. The Team explained that they received substantial support from visiting professors and lecturers who made a very valuable contribution to the teaching of the programme. The Panel noted that online tutors were also in place to support the students.

The Panel asked how the School ensured external lecturers teaching on the programme were fully aware of the Ulster University policies and procedures and noted that each individual had to be approved as a Recognised Teacher and meet the University's requirements before they could teach on the programme.

The Team also advised the Panel that they planned to appoint one main tutor for the programme supported by specialist lecturers who would be responsible for teaching individual topics. The duration of these sessions would vary from, for example, two weeks to four weeks depending on the depth to be covered. The Panel also noted that many of the specialist lecturers did not receive payment for their input to the programme.

The Panel asked what contingency plans were in place should the main tutor be unable to continue supporting the programme. Professor Moore explained that she could not run the programme without the support of the Programme Co-Ordinator (Mrs Sharon Shirley) and the two visiting professors, Mr Antonio Leccisotti and Mr Dan Reinstein. The Panel heard that there was a strong support network in place to continue offering the programme. The Panel also noted that in reality the School could not afford to pay for the external expertise involved in the delivery of the programme. The Course Director emphasised that the external tutors brought huge expertise and were distinguished individuals in the field.

3.3 Further Study Options

The Panel noted that the MSc in Cataract and Refractive Surgery (Theory) had been withdrawn, mainly due to the significant time involved in supervising student projects. The Panel asked what alternatives were available to students who wished to progress further after completing the Postgraduate Diploma in Cataract and Refractive Surgery (Theory).

The Team advised that the School currently offered other MSc programmes that students could consider, eg, Optometry, and Vision Science. The Team was also of the opinion that for the true academic a PhD would be an attractive option if they were interested in research.

The Panel noted that for those students who only wanted to be a laser surgeon the PgD in Cataract and Refractive Surgery was the best option.

3.4 Assessment

The Panel queried the why 80% of the module assessment was allocated to online discussions but was advised that this had been a recommendation from the external examiner. The Team explained that the discussions formed a significant part of the programme.

The Panel asked if there would be any opportunities for providing feedback to students at the end of each module to inform them about their overall performance and if they were engaging with the programme.

The Team appreciated that some students could be apprehensive about posting their knowledge in a discussion but advised the Panel that they worked through any issues that became apparent to help increase the student's confidence.

The Panel asked if the Team had considered providing an exemplar answer at the end of the first module to let students see what a good answer should look like. The Team acknowledged the suggestion but explained that they did not always use the same discussion topics each year.

The Panel also queried what a 'substantive posting' was. The Team explained that students were advised what would be required for a 'substantive posting'. The Panel noted that the Team would look for comments that were fully backed-up by a literature review and a strong clinical reason. The Panel noted that some students' answers could be short but this did not mean it was not right. The Panel noted that all student work was double-marked.

3.5 Word Counts

The Panel queried the penalising of students for going over the word limit set and asked if the Team had considered allocating marks for staying within the required limit instead. The Team advised the Panel that the Faculty had recently produced a policy on the approach to setting word limits and that a decision on an overall University policy would be made later in the year.

The Panel felt that if word limit penalties were included in modules then in theory the Team had to apply them. The Panel suggested that unless there was a substantial rationale for having penalties in place they should not be included.

3.6 Student Support

The Panel asked if there was a Studies Advisor for the programme and noted there was no formal appointee. The Team explained that the Course Team and the e-tutors took on the role of subject specific study advisors.

3.7 Programme Content

The Panel asked how the Team updated the programme content and suggested the inclusion of 'complex cataract surgery'.

The Team explained that they sat down together and discussed the feedback from both the students and the lecturers. The Panel noted that there was a certain amount of influence from those involved in the field. The Team informed the Panel that there had been relatively

small changes made to the content recently but they appreciated each year there would be a need for adjustments.

3.8 Curriculum Design Principles

The Panel asked the Team if they had taken into consideration Ulster's new curriculum design principles during the preparation for the revalidation, for example, the number of module credit points, the number of module learning outcomes and the requirement for only two pieces of assessment.

The Team explained that due to the nature of the subject some modules did not need to be very long. The Team felt that joining up modules to make a 20-credit point module to accommodate the principles would not work. The Team considered it difficult to accommodate all of the new curriculum design principles.

The Panel also commented on the non-standardisation of the hours allocated to critique and lectures in modules. For example, some 15-credit point modules allocated 80 hours for critique and lectures with the same number of hours allocated for a 20-credit point module. The Team agreed that this was a matter that they could address but emphasised to the Panel that the experience of a student studying online was different from an on-campus experience and that there was a need to engage with the students more.

4 CONDITIONS AND RECOMMENDATIONS

The Panel commended the Subject Team on the following:

- The uniqueness of the programme and the highly accomplished Course Team
- The relationship between the Course Team and the Royal College of Ophthalmologists
- The multidisciplinary group of students who chose to study on the programme
- The innovative approach to teaching provided by the Course Team
- The benefits of the programme to both experienced and non-experienced individuals involved in the subject area

The Panel agreed to recommend to the Academic Standards and Quality Enhancement Committee that the provision be approved for a further five years (intakes 2018/19 to 2022/23 inclusive) subject to the condition and recommendations of the Panel being addressed and a satisfactory response and a revised submission being forwarded to the Academic Office by 18 January 2018 for approval by the Chair of the Panel.

Condition

- (i) that the regulatory and standards matters identified by the Academic Office be addressed (appendix).

Recommendations

- (i) that consideration be given to the inclusion of 'complex cataract surgery' as either a lecture or a discussion in the programme;(3.7)
- (ii) that the processes for feedback on student learning be reviewed to include feedback to students on their overall performance at the end of each module; (3.4)

- (iii) that course management and curriculum enhancement be kept under review periodically; (3.7, 3.8)
- (iv) that students be regularly kept up-to-date on course revisions and that a formalised studies advice process be introduced to the programme; (3.6)
- (v) that the approach to student learning and assessment across all modules, ie, contact hours, coursework and independent study be standardised. (3.8)

APPRECIATION

The Chair thanked all the members of the Panel and in particular, the external members, for their valuable contributions to the revalidation exercise.

The Course Director also wished to acknowledge the work undertaken by the programme co-ordinator, Mrs Sharon Shirley, and the external support provided from leading practitioners in the field.